



HOWARD MARKLEIN

STATE SENATOR • 17TH SENATE DISTRICT

Capitol Update By Senator Howard Marklein September 23, 2016

Kids In the Classroom Means Dollars In the Budget

Last week Friday, September 16, 2016, was the third Friday in September. This was an important day for school district budgets throughout the state. It was the day that all public schools in Wisconsin conducted their pupil enrollment count for submission to the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). **The Membership Count is the most important variable in determining a school district's budget.**

Do not be alarmed! You may be experiencing a little déjà vu. I wrote a similar column about this topic last year. It is THAT important.

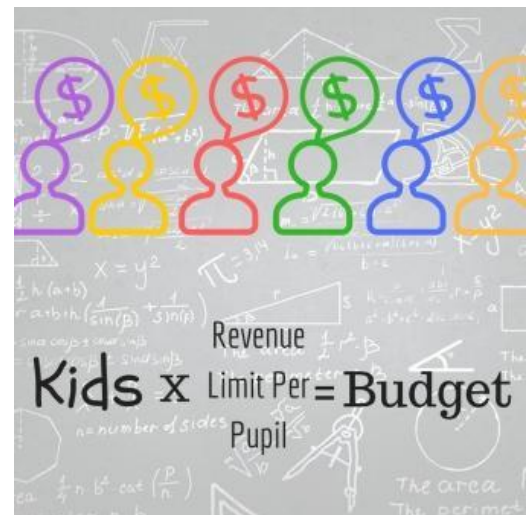
As your State Senator, I often hear that we should be spending generously on education. I agree – and we have. But I also know that with our current school funding formula, more spending on education does not necessarily translate to more money for every school district budget.

School district budgets are determined by the Membership Count (the number of kids) multiplied by the districts' per pupil revenue limit (the amount of taxes and state aid a district has per student). The per pupil revenue limit is a state-imposed limit based on historic data and spending. Each district is evaluated individually, which is why there is a range in per pupil revenue limits throughout the state. This formula has been used in Wisconsin for about 20 years.

According to DPI, "Membership" is defined as the average of the resident full-time equivalent (FTE) students enrolled on the third Friday of September and second Friday of January (including part-time attendance by home-based or private school students), plus the summer school and foster group home FTE.

For example, if a district's enrollment is 1,200 pupils and its allowable revenue limit per pupil is \$10,000 (approximate state average for 2015-2016), the district's budget is \$12,000,000. Using the same allowable revenue limit per pupil, a district of 700 pupils would have a budget of \$7,000,000.

If a student body increases, the budget increases. If a student body decreases, the budget decreases. As a result, the total dollars dedicated to public education in Wisconsin are less important than the actual number of students in the classroom, especially in rural school districts.



I often ask school leaders to consider whether they would prefer 10 more students or \$100,000 more in state aids. The answer is always (or at least it should be) 10 more students. More state aid does not increase the budget. More students in the classroom does increase the budget.

This is why you will see some school districts assertively marketing open enrollment to students in neighboring districts. More kids in the classroom ultimately translates to more dollars in the budget. It is one variable that a school district can most directly influence.

You also see our communities working hard to grow existing businesses, entice new employers and improve infrastructure to keep families in rural Wisconsin. Economic development, jobs and quality of life have a major impact on K-12 education. Economic development efforts directly impact local school finance.

The Southwest Partners group in Richland County is a great example of a grassroots, community effort to address these issues. The group works hard to partner students with local businesses for work experience and education. Many students have recognized that there are great jobs right in Richland County and with education, ambition and connections, they have a future in our rural communities. Not only does this benefit the individual student (and future worker), it is good for the business, the school districts, the communities, the churches and small businesses throughout the county. Community innovation!

At this time, the full reporting for enrollment counts is not yet available from the DPI. But as we begin budget deliberations in 2017, I will be analyzing this data further and ask that you keep the math in mind: kids in the classroom mean dollars in the budget.

For more information and to connect with me, visit my website <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/17/marklein> and subscribe to my weekly E-Update by sending an email to Sen.Marklein@legis.wisconsin.gov. Do not hesitate to call 800-978-8008 if you have input, ideas or need assistance with any state-related matters.

###